

Almost Certain

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Summary: 'Noncompliance' Universe. While Hashirama and Madara are away from the village on business, Tobirama is tasked with caring for Kise during their absence. But when the boy continues to ask about the marks on his uncle's face and refuses to relent, the younger Senju brother proposes a challenge that he hopes will provide him with some much needed peace and quiet. COMPLETE.

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I know this is short, but it's cute and I wanted to show some Tobirama-Kise bonding during the interim between 'Adaptability' and the new multi-chapter fic I'm working on for this universe. Please enjoy and drop a review!

Meadie out.

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{Almost Certain}

It was warm for April, and the sun shooed away the whispers of clouds that lingered overhead, floated along by a breeze that came in random, startling gusts and rattled the fresh leaves on the oak in the courtyard. Madara and Hashirama had been away for twelve days on a diplomatic trip to some minor, newly-formed village far to the east, and Kise could do little to quell his boredom as glanced over his shoulder from where he squatted beside the koi pond, casting a dull frown at his uncle.

"What?" Tobirama asked flatly without looking up from his scrolls, riddled with notes regarding a new jutsu that only he seemed to be able to decipher. "Are you not sufficiently exhausted from your training this morning?"

"Nothing," Kise muttered, dropping a pebble into the water and watching as the vividly-colored carp splashed frantically against the surface before falling quiet once more. "When will dad and father be home?"

With a weary sigh, the Senju raised his crimson gaze from his papers, fixing his nephew with an irritated glare. "Tomorrow. The day after, perhaps."

The boy's shoulders sagged dramatically as he stood and dusted his palms against his pants, walking to flop down on the porch beside the elder man, who watched him carefully with narrow eyes. "The day after, huh?"

"Am I so dull that you are pining for your parents, brat?" Tobirama scoffed, his pride stung by the little Uchiha's indifference and the marks along his cheeks arching downward with his scowl. "I only stay here because anija asked me to keep an eye on you while he was away."

"No!" Kise said emphatically when he sat up with a violent jolt, earning an incredulously arched eyebrow in response. "It's just thatâ€¦ the day after is special. So I want them to come home soon."

A light breeze drug its fingers through the mess of Tobirama's pale hair as he snorted, still mildly offended by the child's eagerness to send him on his way. Regardless, he had grown rather fond of the boy over the past several years, even managing to improve his relationship with Madara â€" albeit slowly and tremulously â€" since Kise's adoption. The Uchiha patriarch was still far too stubborn and inherently dangerous for the younger Senju brother to discard his suspicion wholly, but the pair had managed to reach some mutual understanding. No matter Hashirama's foolhardy insistence, Tobirama continued to refuse to refer to Madara as brother-in-law; though calling the boy nephew seemed to come much easier after no small amount of prodding.

"Uncle!" Kise chirped, desperate for anything to rescue his thoughts from the boredom of the afternoon. "Tell me how you got the marks on your face."

"I was attacked by a very large bird," he stated dryly in response as he turned back to his papers.

The boy pouted dramatically â€" a habit he had undoubtedly learned from the Hokage â€" and tossed his bangs from his eyes with a determined shake of his head, a habit he had undoubtedly learned from his other father, Tobirama thought with sly amusement. "You always do that! You say something silly every time I ask! Last time you said it was a bear, and the time before that you said you said that you were almost swallowed by a giant fish, and the time before that you said they were from when you messed up when you were trying out a new jutsu, and the time before thatâ€¦..."

"Okay! I get itâ€¦!"

"So are you going to tell me the truth?!" the little Uchiha piped, hopeful.

"No."

"What?! Why not?!"

"Because I don't want to."

"Come on, please? Tomorrow's my birthday," Kise drawled pitifully with a whine, long hair falling over his shoulders in a wild shroud as he leaned shamelessly into his uncle's space.

Shooing the boy away with a pointed swat to the head with a tightly rolled scroll, Tobirama resisted a smirk as a thought invaded his mind. "Fine," he said smugly, though his expression was indifferent. "Your eleventh birthday is tomorrow. If you can manage to learn a simple wind release technique by midnight, then I'll tell you."

"Really?!"

"Sure."

"What is it?! Tell me, Uncle!" the child asked with unbridled enthusiasm, leaping to his feet impatiently.

"Wind Release: Gale Palm," the elder man informed as he casually clapped his hands together, a violent gust of air bursting forth to knock Kise flat on his backside, eyes wide with surprise. "Despite your talent with katon jutsu, nephew, I sense a strong affinity for fuuton as well. If you can harness this nature, you can use it to augment your fire style techniques and shuriken jutsu in the future."

"Cool! So all I have to do is learn it by my birthday?"

Tobirama huffed with a faint grin, as it was always amusing to watch the boy grow flustered "it was much like goading someone with Hashirama's foolish zeal and Madara's searing temper into an argument, only to prove them wrong. Given all of Kise's eagerness and his own desire to acquire a bit of peace so as to focus on the jutsu he was developing, he certainly would not make his challenge \_that\_ easy. "You have until midnight to manage a release that is powerful enough to knock all of the leaves from that tree," he said as he gestured to the large oak in the courtyard with his chin, before glancing up to the position of the sun. "Which means you have about eight hours. Run along."

A broad smirk unzipped across the child's face "one that reminded the Senju of Izuna far too much for his own liking" and a devious glint of confidence flashed in black eyes. "I'll only need six, Uncle!"

"Awfully sure of ourselves, aren't we?" Tobirama arched one brow as he commented dryly.

"I am! Because I want to know why you have silly red lines on your face!" Kise shouted in return, levelling an accusatory finger at the elder shinobi before scampering off, deeply wounded by his uncle's blatant lack of faith in his abilities. He would show that pasty old man, the boy decided with a stubborn grunt, expressing as much in the angry glare he tossed over his shoulder.

Tobirama did not particularly care where the brat ran off to as he watched his slender frame disappear into the shadows of his brother's home, soon bolting through the front door and towards the training grounds. No matter, he was permitted some semblance of quiet for a long while, occasionally feeling about to ensure that his nephew had not exhausted himself entirely of his chakra, which was surprisingly vast for a child of his age. The boy's signature felt like a bizarre blending of Uchiha and Senju power, though his blood ran pure with the fiery resilience and allure of the former. Certainly Hashirama's influence upon Kise's life had some import to that effect, soothing the flame to a mere controlled burn, limiting it to within the borders of a hearth through unconditional love and unwavering tenderness. Perhaps that was the same phenomena that had managed to tame Madara to some degree over the past ten years; and Tobirama mused that such an accomplishment was more than enough for his anija to earn the title Shinobi no Kami, limitless chakra and boundless skill aside. Anyone who was capable of shackling Uchiha Madara to a life of peace and domesticity was fearsome, indeed.

As the sun crept lower, dragging the evening over the sky like a faded quilt of vivid color, the breeze shifted in from the north, causing bitter chills to rise on Tobirama's pale skin and jarring him from his intense focus. It had long since grown dark, the hour just past ten o'clock, and the Senju rose from his seat on the porch to collect the papers he had strewn rather carelessly about, aligning them into neat piles before tucking them beneath his arm. He was pondering the merits of wandering out into the chill of the night to fetch his nephew for a belated meal when the front door slammed open, the heavy patter of bare feet tearing through the house. Kise skid to a halt before the Senju, looking as if he had taken quite a beating judging from the dirt smeared over his clothes and the leaves knotted in his long hair, though the boy's smile was broad and confident.

"I did it, Uncle!"

Tobirama raised a skeptical brow, crimson eyes narrowing doubtfully. "In just over six hours? You may be exceptional, little nephew, but I am struggling to believe you."

"It's true!" Kise insisted, small fists marred with chakra burns curled stubbornly by his sides. "I'll be able to knock all the leaves from dad's tree, just you watch! And you'll have to tell me how you got the marks on your face!"

"You're welcome to try," the elder man offered, low voice flat as he gestured to the broad-boughed oak behind him. It was still remarkable, he thought to himself as he watched the boy bound into the courtyard, how much Kise had grown and changed in the last three and a half years since he had been adopted into Hashirama's lopsided, patchwork family. And it was a grand coincidence — as Tobirama refused to believe in such superstitious folly as \_fate\_ — that a child born of a mediocre branch of the Uchiha clan had been such an impressive anomaly, and had also managed to be raised by the two most powerful shinobi in existence. Any child could have been saved by the Hokage's guilty, bleeding heart; but it happened to be this one. Though he supposed that Madara scarcely would have tolerated the circumstances so well if the boy had \_not\_ \_proven\_ to be exceptional.

Tobirama snorted with amusement when Kise took a solid stance, closing his eyes in concentration before clapping his hands fiercely together, shouting with determination. "Wind Release: Gale Palm!"

An impressive blast of air tore through the courtyard, ripping the leaves from the stately tree that grew there in a frenzied whirlwind of green, and the Senju's eyes widened for a moment in genuine surprise. Fading quickly, the gust died out as abruptly as it arrived, permitting the loosened debris to flutter to the ground like a vivid flurry of snow and coating the earth in a thick layer of emerald as Kise smirked triumphantly, his breath leaving him in heaving gasps.

"Not bad," Tobirama commented with a nod, shaking several leaves from his pale hair and folding his arms over his chest. "But you missed one."

"What?!" the boy shouted as he followed his uncle's gaze to a lone leaf trembling stubbornly from a limb at the top of the crown, taunting him as it held fast. "Dammit!"

"Hey!" the elder scolded as he swatted the child with his papers. "Watch your language!"

"So?! You say it all the time, uncle! And so does father!"

"Precisely. And who do you think will get in trouble if you say that in front of Hashirama? Me or Madara?"

"You, I hope!" Kise spat with a juvenile pout, turning to glare once more at the leaf dangling spitefully in the treetop.

At this Tobirama laughed â€" a deep, genuine rumble that made his chest ache in a way that he could not recall experiencing before. Sighing, he patted the boy's head with a burly hand, marveling at how greatly Kise's frown resembled Hashirama, and tugged the child along as he retreated inside once more.

"Better luck next time, little nephew."

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